



back up

transforming lives after spinal cord injury

Limitless Ambition

to Transform Lives

Back Up's 2025 – 2030 Strategy

Executive Summary

Back Up empowers people to adapt and thrive after spinal cord injury.

Our strategy, Limitless Ambition, builds on the success of Transforming Lives (2021-2025) with even bolder efforts to reach more people affected by spinal cord injury at critical moments in their journey. We are determined to ensure that no-one in need of our support is left behind. To better serve our community, Limitless Ambition demands transformational change in both our digital and data capabilities and our in-person delivery. These changes will enable us to provide more personalised and impactful support to those we serve.

Over 500 people have helped create our strategy through workshops, interviews, surveys and focus groups.

People who use our services, Back Up volunteers, and supporters have helped identify three goals that underpin our mission;

Living Confidently: empowering people with a spinal cord injury with the confidence, knowledge and practical skills to live a full and independent life.

Everyone Thriving: ensuring all individuals affected by spinal cord injury can reach their full potential.

Meaningful Connections: creating opportunities for people affected by spinal cord injury to connect with others in similar situations to achieve their goals.

This strategy is a living document. We will report annually on our progress toward meeting our objectives. You can learn more and follow our journey here:

www.backuptrust.org.uk/about-us/the-back-up-strategy

To our supporters, volunteers, partners and patrons thank you for your unwavering commitment. If you are new to Back Up, we hope our strategy inspires you to join us in making our goals a reality.



Abigail Lock | CEO



Damian Riley | Chair of Trustees

Back Up Strategy

2025-2030

Vision

A world where people with spinal cord injury can reach their full potential.

Mission

Deliver services that build confidence, independence and inspire people affected by spinal cord injury to transform their lives.

Values and Behaviours

Embrace challenge

Bold, Adaptable

Have fun

Positive, Motivational

Build inclusive communities

Open, Friendly

Ambitious for each other

Expert, Strive for Better

Living Confidently:

empowering people with a spinal cord injury with the confidence, knowledge and practical skills to live a full and independent life.

Everyone Thriving:

ensuring all individuals affected by spinal cord injury can reach their full potential.

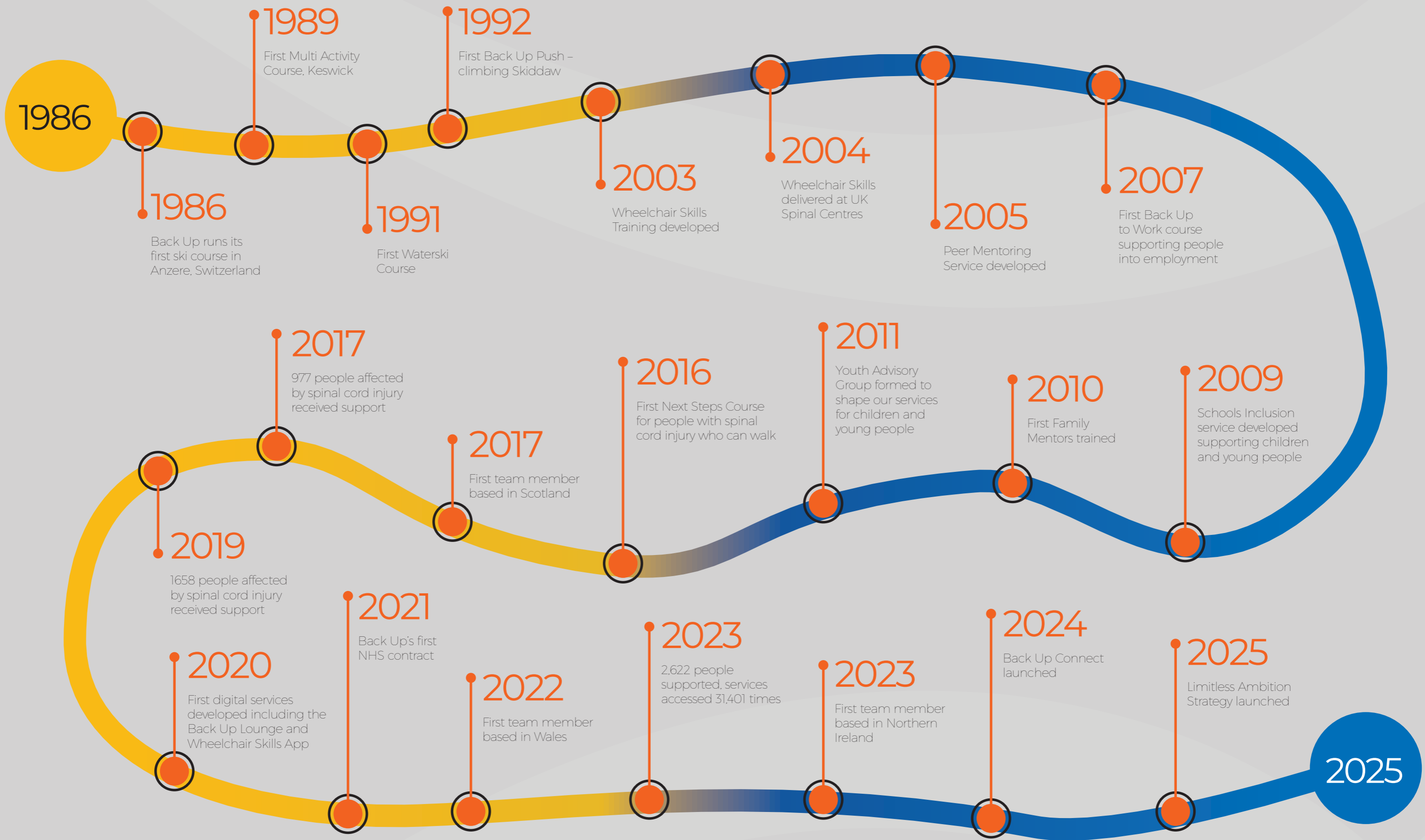
Meaningful Connections:

creating opportunities for people affected by spinal cord injury to connect with others in similar situations to achieve their goals.

Our Foundations

- Lived Understanding
- Growing Income to Meet our Ambition
- Being Data-led
- Driving Efficiency and Effectiveness
- Developing and Empowering our People
- Powered by Volunteers
- Being Inclusive
- Compelling Communications
- Committed to Collaboration
- Well-run, Sustainable Organisation





Looking back on all we have achieved



Why We Exist

Back Up supports people affected by spinal cord injury to get the most out of life.

We get it because our award winning services are designed and delivered by people in a similar situation.



What We Do

- Wheelchair skills training
- Accredited mentoring
- Life skills and activity courses
- Online courses supporting post injury adjustment
- Support returning to work volunteering, or education
- Family support
- Peer connections and community
- Dedicated services for children and young people



What We **Do Not** Do

- Offer statutory services where public bodies have a legal duty to provide them (unless devolved through procurement frameworks)
- Provide clinical or medical support or advice
- Deliver core regulated services such as counselling, housing advice, money or financial advice
- Provide grants

What is Spinal Cord Injury?

The spinal cord is a bundle of nerves and other tissue which extends from the brain's base at the top of your neck down the length of your back. It is protected by the bones (or vertebrae) that make up the spine, and by spinal fluid.

Your brain and spinal cord are vital for controlling your bodily functions. The spinal cord is responsible for communicating two-way messages to and from the brain to all parts of the body: your muscles, organs and your skin. We are able to feel pain and move our arms and legs because of these messages or impulses.

If the spinal cord is damaged or injured, some of the messages or impulses may be 'interrupted'. This can lead to partial or total loss of feeling or movement in parts of your body, including your limbs and the loss of control of your bladder, bowel and sexual function.

Most injuries cause loss of movement and feeling in the parts of the body below the level of the injury. If you damage or sever your spinal cord close to your neck, this will cause paralysis in a larger part of the body than damage to your spinal cord lower down your back. As well as the physical impact of a spinal cord injury, there are also emotional and psychological effects on the person concerned – and their family and friends.



The Need We are Addressing:

In 2024, NHS data revealed that

4,400 people in the UK were injured or diagnosed with a spinal cord injury,

nearly double the 2,500 previously estimated. This increase reflects both improved data collection and a genuine rise in the number of spinal cord injuries. The NHS believes even these figures may understate the true scale of the issue.



Every two hours



someone in the UK is injured or diagnosed with spinal cord injury. It could be as the result of an illness, or something as simple as falling down the stairs. Spinal cord injury can affect anyone at any time. **It could even happen to you.**

Key Facts



Approximately **105,000** people are living with spinal cord injury in the UK.



Less than a third of individuals with spinal cord injury are employed.



Suicide rates are five times higher among people with spinal cord injury, with the highest risk occurring in the first ten years post-injury.



Around 200 children and young people sustain a spinal cord injury each year.

For Back Up, this means that we need to think differently about how to provide our transformative services to a much larger group of people. To convey the scale of our ambition, Back Up starts the strategy supporting around 2,600 people affected by spinal cord injury each year. To expand our reach and impact we will invest in digital services and regional delivery both of which will be key to our future.

What distinguishes us?

We get it – because we have been where you are. Back Up's services are designed using lived experience by people affected by spinal cord injury.

What matters to the Back Up community

We spoke with people with spinal cord injury who have used our services and those that have not. We engaged with people who have recently sustained an injury and those who have lived with spinal cord injury for many years. We talked with family members and asked what matters most to our supporters and volunteers, NHS professionals and partner organisations.

You told us that you loved the real impact that we have on people's outlook and approach to living life, but you thought that there are many people who needed our support that we aren't reaching. You wanted us to ensure that we were there for everyone affected by spinal cord injury, whatever their background or circumstances.



You told us we need to focus more on:

Being There for Everyone Affected by Spinal Cord Injury



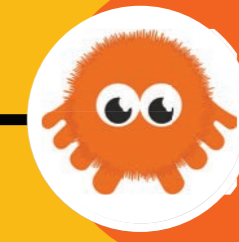
Effective Communication



Digital Growth



Retaining the Back Up Bug!



Regional Approach



Collaborating with Partner Organisations



How You Described Back Up in One Word



Excellent Creative Approachable Empathetic Phenomenal
 Emerging Out-of-the-box Empowerment Life-saver Charity
 Amazing Wonderful Fantastic Lived-experience
 Practical Useful Hopeful Essential
 Magical Proactive Friendly
 Transformative **Supportive**
 Caring **Helpful** Inspirational
 Great Incredible Warm Living Fun
 Support Awesome Positive Important Frontline
 Invaluable Community Critical Inspiring Indispensable
 Family Life Imperative Encouraging Friendship
 Good Transformational Responsive Confidence-building
 Innovative Focused
 Network Understanding Hugely-beneficial Live Capable
 Transforming Changing Informative Inclusive Orange
 Empowering Brilliant Necessity Key Transformed my life

Our strategy will help us to achieve our vision and will guide everything we do today, tomorrow and to 2030.

We have three goals:



Goal one

Living Confidently: empowering people with a spinal cord injury with the confidence, knowledge and practical skills to live a full and independent life.

Setting the Scene

Spinal cord injury can change your life in an instant. The impact can be catastrophic, affecting every area of your life from your bladder, bowel and sexual function to your career and relationships and how you age. For others the impact of spinal cord injury develops over time.

Adjusting to spinal cord injury can be overwhelming, but we believe it shouldn't stop anyone from getting the most out of life. Our award-winning, practical services challenge preconceptions and are there to show people affected by spinal cord injury what is possible; we help increase skills, confidence and know-how for living life independently.

What did people with spinal cord injury tell us?

“Maintain Back Up’s core services but grow the organisation’s reach with more regional activities and support.”

“At the beginning of my rehab, Back Up were amazing at getting me involved in multi-activities and being able to help me cope with my new life.”

“I took so much from Back Up’s What Next? course, I got so many tips. I was so inspired and motivated afterwards.”



Our Focus to 2030

Expand Regional Delivery:

We will grow the number and variety of our in-person services, closer to where people live, offering support when it matters. We'll ensure our services better reflect the diversity of the spinal cord injured community. We will deliver services in every region of the UK.



Growing Digital Resources:

Our online support will be available right from the beginning of the adjustment process so that individuals have the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to live life independently. Using data and insight we'll target our services to those who need them the most.



Supporting Return to Work, Education and Volunteering:

We'll be leaders in helping people with spinal cord injury return to work, education or volunteering. Taking a confidence building approach to addressing life's barriers in areas such as travel and transport so that they don't get in the way or stop people realising their ambitions. We will collaborate with education providers, employers, the NHS, partner charities and other organisations to enable people with spinal cord injury to realise their ambitions.

Goal two

Everyone Thriving: ensuring all individuals affected by spinal cord injury can reach their full potential.

Setting the Scene

Spinal cord injury does not discriminate it can affect any body of any age, gender, race, socioeconomic status or geography. Whatever your background, whatever you look like, whether you are old or young, have a higher or lower-level injury, regardless of your interests or circumstances, Back Up is there for you.

We know that the support each person and their family needs will vary according to circumstances and stage of life. How someone acquired an injury, available financial resources and the ability for individuals to access support, also differ. Back Up is committed to ensuring that anyone who needs us can get support.

What did people with spinal cord injury tell us?

“Tetras have a very different experience of spinal cord injury.”

“Back Up widens horizons.”

“I was scared and anxious. I wear a head scarf, what would they think of me? I used to ignore Back Up on the ward. Why would they help me? Back Up’s course made me realise things are possible. We can do things as a family. May Allah reward and bless you all.”



Our Focus to 2030

Reaching Those Who Need Us Most:

Our services will be targeted at those who need us most. We will focus on engaging with and removing barriers for people who face the greatest challenges in adjusting to life following spinal cord injury - at those times when we can have the most impact.



Tailored Support for Every Stage of Life:

From childhood to old age we will tailor our approach to what matters to an individual throughout their lives. Whatever background or level of injury – we will be there helping people fulfil their education, career, family life, travel, hobbies and social life goals, so that they can live the life they want.



Supporting Children and Young People:

We will be there for every child and young person affected by spinal cord injury - giving young people and their families the skills, confidence and knowledge to overcome barriers and open up a world of possibility.

Goal three

Meaningful Connections: creating opportunities for people affected by spinal cord injury to connect with others in similar situations to achieve their goals.

Setting the Scene

Adjusting to spinal cord injury can be overwhelming both for the person with a spinal cord injury and their family. People can often feel isolated and alone, thinking no one could possibly understand what they are going through. No one needs to face living with spinal cord injury alone. We use lived experiences to ensure people reach their goals.

Almost four out of five people sustaining spinal cord injury do not receive inpatient rehabilitation at a specialist Spinal Cord Injury Centre. This means that recently injured people spend less time learning from others in a similar situation. Typically, this can be people with co-morbidities, those with Cauda Equina or people with lower-level injuries who can walk. We know that connecting with others in a similar situation can positively influence the adjustment process of living with a spinal cord injury both for the individual and their family. It can make the difference between surviving, or thriving.

What did people with spinal cord injury tell us?

“Back Up opened my eyes to what is possible and introduced me to people further along in their journey.”

“I had been shocked by how little knowledge of spinal cord injury there is in mainstream health and social care services.”

“I now feel I can support my brother when he needs it but most of the time can just get on with being a sister.”



Our Focus to 2030

Creating Meaningful Connections:

We will create more opportunities for people affected by spinal cord injury to connect with others who understand their experience. These connections will help people gain confidence and practical support, guiding them through their adjustment to life post-injury. We will provide clear pathways for individuals to become supporters and mentors, helping others along their journey.



Supporting Families:

We will be leaders in supporting family members of those with a spinal cord injury. This begins with the acute phase, through information and support online and in-person at relatives' days, to post-discharge from the hospital through peer mentoring, family rehabilitation, online courses and dedicated digital pathways. Helping family members recognise that a positive future is possible.



Partnerships for Greater Impact:

We will work alongside the NHS, wheelchair services and other partner organisations to reach those who may not have access to specialist spinal cord injury centres. By sharing resources based on lived experience we'll challenge negative perceptions of spinal cord injury and show that a positive future is possible.

Our Values and Behaviours

Our daily activities differ, but our values and the way we work with each other should be the same. Our values and behaviours have been developed by the Back Up staff team and trustees. They help us to understand how we should be working and how we can expect other people to behave.

We embrace challenge

Challenge is central to our learning and growth; it helps us gain knowledge and skills. By finding ways to overcome challenge and move forward we gain a sense of achievement, supporting us to realise our full potential.

To live our value of embracing challenge we will:

Be bold – doing things we've never done before, pushing the boundaries of what's possible.

Be adaptable – being willing to test and learn new ways of working. Remaining open to new ideas and opportunities.

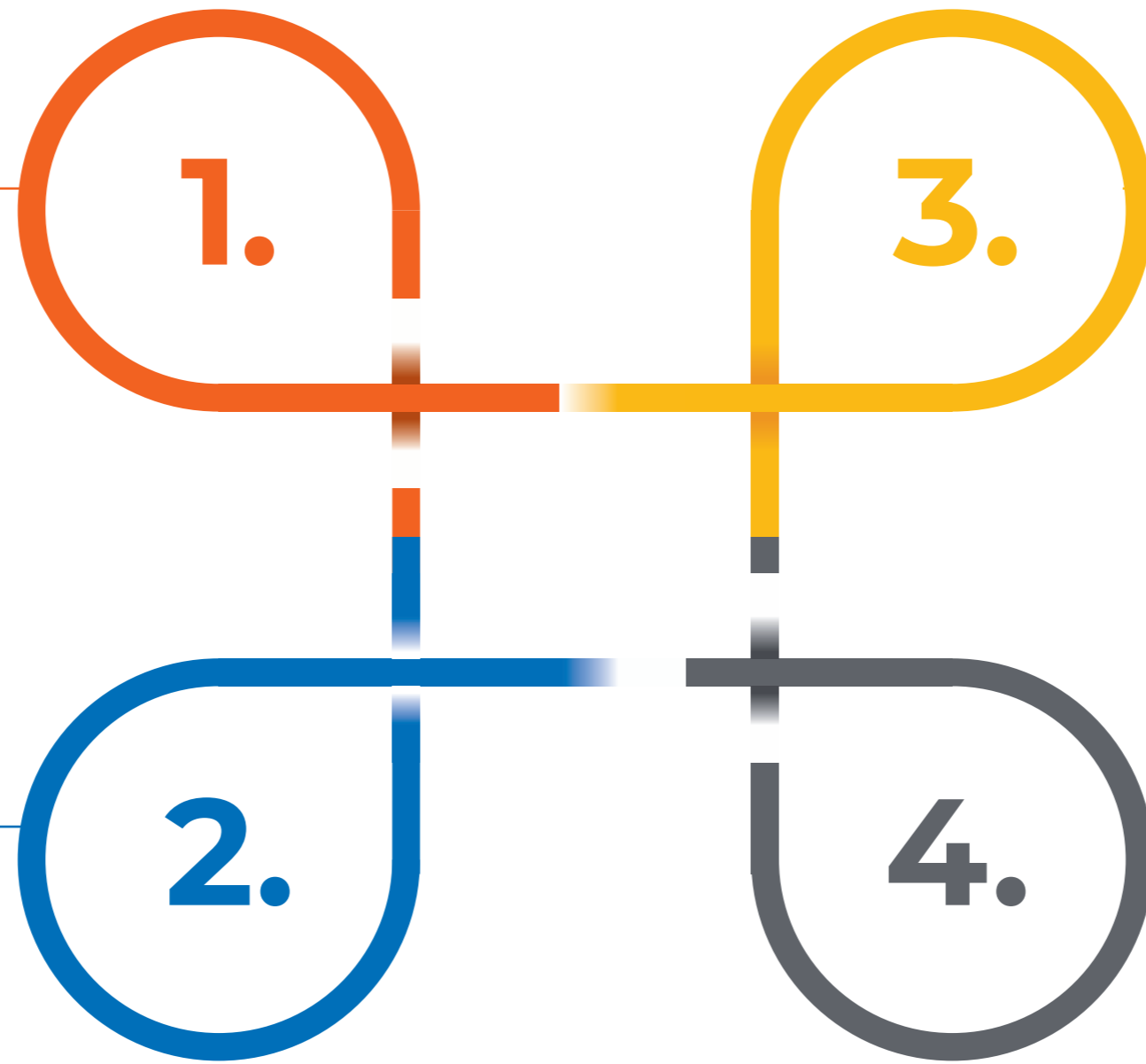
We build inclusive communities

We achieve more for people affected by spinal cord injury when we work together. We are collaborative and inclusive in our approach. We embrace diversity, working with and supporting individuals, groups, and the wider spinal cord injury community, bringing people together.

To live our value of building inclusive communities we will:

Be open – working collaboratively we are receptive to and respecting of other perspectives.

Be friendly – we make others feel welcome and comfortable to be themselves. We can be relied upon and are supportive.



We have fun

We believe that having fun allows us to connect with others, whilst opening up opportunities to develop, achieve and get the most out of life, showing that there is a positive future after spinal cord injury.

To live our value of having fun we will:

Be positive – taking an optimistic approach to life's ups and downs and celebrating our efforts.

Be motivational – we are passionate advocates for Back Up's work and our ethos of having fun.

We are ambitious for each other

We are passionate about our work. Always driven by the needs of people affected by spinal cord injury. We listen to what people want, provide innovative responses and learn quickly. We encourage each other to give our best.

To live our value of being ambitious for each other we will:

Be expert – we strive to excel at what we do. Trusted for the quality of our work. We keep our promises, delivering when we say we will. Taking every opportunity to learn and grow.

Strive for better – we set high standards and always challenge ourselves to give our best. We are receptive to constructive feedback. Taking a can-do attitude, we proactively look for better ways to deliver.



Our Foundations

01 Lived Understanding

1) Lived Understanding

Lived experience shapes every service we offer and our approach. We will continue to be led by what matters most to people affected by spinal cord injury so that we can ensure that Back Up provides the right support at the right time.

02 Growing Income to Meet Our Ambition

2) Growing Income to Meet Our Ambition

Our strategy is ambitious. To achieve our goals, we will need to significantly increase our investment in our charitable objectives. To deliver our plans in full, we need to more than double our income over the course of the strategy a huge stretch! We will maintain a diversified income base whilst recognizing there are no guarantees in life, so our delivery plans have been developed in a responsible way which allows us to scale our approach. We will only commit to expenditure when we have identified income. We will focus on areas which are efficient, sustainable, scalable and ethical.

03 Being Data-led

3) Being Data-led

By making better use of our data, we will gain new insight, build an evidence base and become more responsive to both the people who use our services and our donors. We will invest not only in our digital infrastructure but also in being data-driven and embracing a digital approach, enabling us to increase our reach and impact. Our digital services will complement our face-to-face services, and increase our insight into the changing needs of people affected by spinal cord injury.

04 Driving Efficiency and Effectiveness in All That We Do

4) Driving Efficiency and Effectiveness in All That We Do

We will continuously look for ways to become more efficient so that we can reach more people and have an even greater impact. We will be clear about what we do not do. We will not be afraid to take decisions to stop doing things which don't deliver for people affected by spinal cord injury. We will improve the quality and understanding of our data to support our fundraising and to ensure we maximise the impact of our services.

05 Developing and Empowering Our People

5) Developing and Empowering Our People

We will embrace a learning culture to increase knowledge and performance. We will do this through peer-to-peer learning experiences, encouraging staff development through innovative working practices, and creative thinking. We will align our staff development plans with our strategy and business plans to ensure our staff have the skills and tools they need. We will be curious and learn openly from mistakes, celebrate success and apply these principles to our wider volunteer team and board of trustees. We will actively continue to ensure that wellbeing is central to how we work.

06 Powered by Volunteers

6) Powered by Volunteers

Back Up was founded by volunteers. Volunteering remains at the heart of everything we do. The contribution of our team of over 475 volunteers is felt throughout the whole organisation in all aspects of our work. We will grow the number of our volunteers, finding more ways for our volunteers to get involved across all departments, offering flexible ways for people to support us. We will recruit and retain a diverse mix of volunteers across all regions. We will strengthen the journey from service user to volunteer, ensuring volunteers are supported with the training and resources they need to succeed.

07 Being Inclusive

7) Being Inclusive

We want Back Up to be a place where everyone feels welcome. We will do more to reach a diverse range of people affected by spinal cord injury wherever they are in the UK and remove barriers to inclusion. We will ensure that we are more reflective of the population we serve. This will be reflected in the stories, images and video we use, as well as in our partnerships, volunteer, trustee and staff recruitment. Our board will continue to have at least 50% representation of people affected by spinal cord injury. We will continue to ensure our calendar of activities are inclusive for all those we serve.

08 Compelling Communications

8) Compelling Communications

Engaging and targeted communications tell the stories of those we support and help to raise national brand awareness. We will focus on our digital and social media presence, encourage user generated content and initiate high-profile PR campaigns which positively challenge the perceptions of all that is possible with a spinal cord injury.

09 Committed to Collaboration

9) Committed to Collaboration

We will learn from others and work with partners to develop our services. By working more closely with other charities, Spinal Cord Injury Centres, wheelchair services, the wider hospital network and other organisations that can help us achieve our mission we will reduce duplication of effort and target resources where needed.

10 Well-run, Sustainable Organisation

10) Well-run, Sustainable Organisation

We will be transparent, measurable and accountable in all that we do. We will take decisions for the longer term whilst taking an ethical and environmentally sustainable approach. We will always keep the needs of people affected by spinal cord injury central to all we do.



“We are delighted to support the work of Back Up, because their services are informed by lived experience and peer support, leading to transformative outcomes for the people they work with. We have been consistently impressed by the scope and impact of their services and have been delighted to play a small part in growing this.”

Henry Smith Charity

“We were delighted to be able to award Back Up with a three-year grant in 2024 to appoint staff in Wales who will support people with a new spinal cord injury and their families. Thanks to National Lottery players, the charity is developing and launching the same services to people with spinal cord injuries in Wales as they offer in the rest of the UK.”

John Rose, Director of The National Lottery Community Fund in Wales

“We have partnered with Back Up for over eight years, and the genuine connection between our staff and the charity has fostered a remarkable collaboration. We are incredibly proud of our achievements together. The volunteering opportunities available to our staff have not only provided professional development but have also helped forge lifelong friendships. We look forward to continuing this meaningful partnership.”

Mary Kenny, Chief Executive Officer, Eversholt Rail



In the words of... our supporters

Without invaluable support from our volunteers, our funders including trusts, foundations and individual fundraisers we would not be here.

“We’re delighted to be funding Back Up and their vital work. For many disabled people, travelling can be a challenge, but having access to Back Up’s services can be a lifeline for people with spinal cord injury. Their wheelchair skills training and app and the way they share positive real-life travel experiences really helps improve confidence. Awarding grants to experienced organisations like Back Up, to help disabled people make the journeys they choose, is the reason we launched our impact grants programme supporting other charities and organisations.”

Lisa Jones, Director of Charitable Operations at the Motability Foundation

“I love volunteering for Back Up and so enjoy being a part of such a wonderful community. Just two weeks ago I was climbing Latrigg Fell, whilst on the Back Up activity week, in the Lakes, with the most amazing group of people and able to fully appreciate, first hand, the importance of your fundraising events. The difference those few days made to each and every one of those participants was extraordinary and heartwarming. I cannot tell you how rewarding this is for me, and how Back Up has helped me over the past few years to find a truly positive and purposeful path. It works two ways and for that I am very grateful.”

Anna Masters Back Up, Fundraising Volunteer

“I volunteer to be part of a unique charity, others I know have different disabilities often get jealous that I’m involved with a charity that’s so wonderful.”

Back Up Services Volunteer

Our Trustees

Back Up is governed by a board of trustees. These are the people responsible for ensuring we reach our goals. We are committed to ensuring that at least 50% of the board are people affected by spinal cord injury.

"I feel very privileged to be a trustee for this wonderful charity. Since being appointed in 2023, Back Up has continued to increase its reach to even more people affected by spinal cord injury offering a wider pool of services ensuring we have a positive and long term impact on helping to transform lives. I have no doubt that the charity will continue to do great things through the 2030 strategy, but let us not forget, we already are!"

Louise Jolliffe, who has lived with a spinal cord injury from the age of 19



The People We Support

All we do is driven by the needs of people affected by spinal cord injury. Feedback from the people we support proves just how life-changing our services are.

"It feels quite poetic speaking with you now for the last time to think about how I was 9 months ago. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart, when Dad's accident first happened speaking with you was the first thing I did. Just you being there, the way you've listened, you were so kind and so lovely. You've not just given me advice but you shared your experience. You've helped me."

Family member

"My mentor gave me the confidence to just talk to them as someone who is living with similar symptoms. This helped to alleviate a lot of the anxiety that I was experiencing on a daily basis. I went down the rabbit hole of looking things up on the internet multiple times and my mentor helped me to make sense of a lot of what I had found on my own."

A person with spinal cord injury

"Back Up has help my confidence and understanding of my situation to no end."

A person with spinal cord injury

"The group leaders were amazing, so kind and approachable and they gave it their all. They supported us amazingly and they helped me so much throughout the week to gain confidence and they believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. The week was just honestly the best week I've ever had, the people understood how life is with a spinal cord injury and we all clicked, the activities challenged me in a good way and the course was just so enjoyable, gutted to be home!"

A person with spinal cord injury

"Between Mentoring and What Next? Back Up has been absolutely life changing for me."

A person with spinal cord injury

Help Us Make it Happen

Thank you for reading our **Limitless Ambition** strategy. We can only achieve our goals with the help of supporters, volunteers and partners who share our vision. If something in this strategy has inspired you to get involved, please do contact us. We would love to hear from you.




You can help us transform even more lives affected by spinal cord injury in the future. Visit our website to make a donation towards our life-changing services.





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 Registered with
**FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR**